

“SINGING THE FAITH” – The new Methodist hymn collection

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	Revd Barbara Bircumshaw, Chair, Music Resources Group (MRG) Professor Peter Brophy, Editor-in-Chief, MRG
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	The Council approves the proposed procedure at the Conference
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	None

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The aim of this paper is to inform the Council of the progress made during the current Connexional year with the production of the new Methodist hymn collection and of the proposed procedure at the Conference.
Main Points	Good progress has been made in developing the draft hymn collection, reaching agreement between the MRG and Faith & Order and preparing the ground for production of the hymn book & resource. A proposal is made for procedure at the Conference to enable due attention to be paid to any matters of detail while allowing the Conference to focus on the main issues, including formal authorisation.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	See previous Conference and MRG reports
Consultations	During the current year the main consultation has been between the MRG and the Faith & Order Committee. The church as a whole was consulted during the 2008-9 connexional year.

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	None
Faith and Order	Authorisation of the collection (see separate F&O report)
Financial	No direct costs from this paper. Production of the new hymn collection is budgeted within the CCEA cluster's work programme
Personnel	CCEA and volunteers
Legal	Copyright permission
Wider Connexional	All
External (e.g. ecumenical)	It is anticipated that the new collection will primarily be used by Methodist churches.
Risk	The main risk is low sales. Arrangements with a partner publisher are being made with a view to minimising the financial risk to the Church.

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1. Council members will be aware that last year’s Methodist Conference confirmed its commitment to the production of a new authorised hymn collection, asking the Connexional Team to reconfigure the Music Resources Group (MRG) to undertake the work needed to bring detailed recommendations to the Conference 2010. The MRG and the Faith & Order Network and Committee (F&O) have been working intensively since last June to finalise the proposal. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the progress that has been made and to outline the proposed procedure at the Conference 2010. The Council is asked to endorse the latter proposals.
2. An initial draft of the collection had been circulated widely for comment in 2008-9 and on the basis of the responses received, and expert appraisal by the Revd Brian Hoare, the MRG revised the proposals. These were made available to F&O at the beginning of August 2009 and in September all of the F&O Resource Groups received copies of the full words of all the proposed contents for scrutiny. At the same time a small number of independent experts undertook scrutiny of the words from non-theological perspectives, while the MRG’s Music Group continued to evaluate tunes and where necessary commission new arrangements or, indeed, entire new tunes. Preliminary work on indexing etc. has been undertaken by another sub-group.
3. At the end of November 2009, the MRG received the response from F&O and from its independent scrutineers. F&O recommended that approximately 70 items should be removed and provided detailed comments on about 110 others. Some of the comments were concerned with the placing of hymns within the collection while others suggested minor changes. A small number of suggestions were made as to hymns which should be added, nearly all of which might be regarded as classics of their genre. The parallel independent scrutiny group provided a smaller number of nevertheless significant suggestions.
4. F&O also focused on the structure and balance of the collection and in its report it asked MRG to consider its comments carefully. In an intense period of work during December 2009, the Content Selection Group (CSG) of the MRG followed up all these points. It agreed with most of F&O’s requests for removal, though considered that around 10 of these items should be retained. Again, it agreed with most of the suggested editing. It analysed the collection carefully on a number of grounds before agreeing just over 80 replacement hymns to be included. It also made a number of structural changes.
5. In making its decisions, the CSG analysed the emerging collection on a number of grounds: genre; the balance between hymns about, and those addressed to, God; coverage of different theories of the atonement; gender balance (both in terms of language and the representation of hymn writers); coverage of the lectionary; hymns suitable for children and young people; and, hymns from the World Church. The last two categories were given particular emphasis in selecting replacement hymns – for example, CSG looked carefully at which hymns and songs are popular in schools so as to try to ensure that children can be offered items with which they are familiar. The newly revised collection was sent to F&O for further scrutiny at the end of December 2009 and was also examined by a number of independent experts, including some with recent experience of publishing hymn books.
6. An update was provided to Spring Synods with a view to ensuring that the church was aware of what has been happening during the year.
7. F&O provided its further response to MRG in early March 2010. It accepted nearly all of the replacement items, providing comments on a small number. Most importantly it indicated that the revised collection would (once minor issues had been resolved) be suitable for authorisation by the Conference. All of the comments, and again those of independent scrutineers, were considered by the

MRG's CSG on 15th March 2010. At that meeting all major outstanding issues between MRG and F&O were resolved and further progress was made in completing the final draft collection for Conference's approval

8. During this period further work was undertaken on psalms and canticles and agreement was reached on those to be included in a section at the back of the hymn book. Discussions continue on the translation to be used and exact verses to be included – a decision will be made in time to report to the Conference.

9. The MRG will recommend in its report to the Conference that the working title which has been used for some time, "Singing the Faith", should become the title under which the collection is published.

10. Negotiations have taken place with three established hymn book publishers to identify the best partnership arrangement. The aim is to take advantage of the expertise such publishers can provide while retaining control over the publication itself. The intention is that the printed book will be sold directly to churches and individuals rather than through the trade. The MRG Production & Marketing Group has identified a preferred publisher to act as our partner in production and distribution – details are being treated as commercial-in-confidence. Market research and marketing are being undertaken by the Connexional Team within the CCEA cluster.

11. The Music Group of the MRG is continuing its work. It has identified preferred tunes for all items. In a significant number of cases a new arrangement is being commissioned and in a smaller number a new tune. The aim is to ensure that every item in the collection is playable and singable by a wide range of people of differing musical abilities.

12. The MRG took the advice of the Assistant Secretary of the Conference in late 2009 over the most appropriate procedure at the Conference. There is concern that, if representatives were to be encouraged to come forward with detailed amendments at this stage, the integrity of the collection could be compromised. In any case, there is no realistic mechanism to enable representatives to give detailed scrutiny to every item. The recommendation, therefore, is that:

- i. The list of proposed contents (i.e. first lines of hymns within named sections) is made widely available via the "Methodist Recorder", church website etc in April/May.
- ii. Only the list of contents is distributed to members of the Conference (prior to the Conference). However, a printed copy of the full words, with the names of tunes, is available to members during the Conference for reference.
- iii. The MRG Report is taken early within the Representative Session, but that a vote on any amendments, on the report itself and on authorisation takes place on the final day after debate in, and report back by, the Reference Group (see below)
- iv. Detailed amendments to texts are not done by the Conference (i.e. not from the floor / during debate).
- v. Any Notices of Motion are asked for prior to the Conference or, at latest, by coffee time on the Monday of Representative Session
- vi. A small Reference Group is appointed at the start of the Representative Session to look at Notices of Motion. MRG recommends that, although she is not a representative, the Revd Barbara Bircumshaw (Chair of MRG) should sit on the Reference Group together with at least one other member of the MRG with experience of its deliberations. This Group should make its report on the Thursday at which point the Resolution to authorise the collection

should be taken. At the same time, the Conference should appoint someone (perhaps the Chair of the MRG would be the most suitable person) to authorise minor changes on its behalf. Such minor changes may be required in response to problems in obtaining copyright clearance for our preferred words, and similar issues.

13. The aim is to produce the new hymn collection in Spring 2011, with a major launch at the Conference in that year. To achieve this leaves very little time after this year's Conference and any significant changes could make it almost impossible to achieve. Given the long gestation of the collection, and the wide consultation which has already been undertaken, it is the hope of MRG that the Conference will feel able to authorise the collection as presented, subject only to minor consequent changes as detailed above.

14. In concluding this report to the Council, we would like to place on record our debt to the many committed people, members of the MRG, members of F&O, and others, who have worked tirelessly to meet extremely tight deadlines as we seek to produce a hymn collection fit for Methodism in the modern age.

Resolution

The Council approves the proposed procedure at the Conference.